

VZCZCXRO5165
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHSB #0553/01 1791454
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 271454Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3095
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 2000
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2095
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2215
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0753
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1492
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1850
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2271
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4702
RUZEHAA/CDR USEUCOM INTEL VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
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RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000553

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E.O.12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ZIM HUMANITARIAN CRISIS GROWS: WITH UN AGENCIES
IMMOBILIZED, IDPS LOOK TO EMBASSIES

REF A: HARARE 503
REF B: HARARE 522
REF C: LUSAKA 684
REF D: MAPUTO 546

SUMMARY

1. (U) The humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe continues to worsen. Politically motivated violence continues unabated. Humanitarian space continues to shrink. Access to the most vulnerable populations remains restricted. All this, combined with a high level of uncertainty, and exacerbated by the Zimbabwean government's (GOZ) decision to suspend humanitarian operations (Reftel A), has turned an election into a complex humanitarian emergency. Over the past week, internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to move around the country and urban areas in an often futile search for assistance and protection. Coordination efforts by UN and international organizations have been inadequate, and the humanitarian community is scrambling to address the growing problems. The number of IDPs is expected to increase significantly over the coming days as people flee a potential new campaign of post-election political violence and repression. END SUMMARY.

Desperate IDPs look to embassies for protection

¶2. (SBU) Over the past four days, in the wake of the Mugabe regime's campaign of violence and displacement, including the recent ban on most NGO activities and raid on the opposition headquarters where some 2,600 IDPs had sought refuge, several hundred IDPs have turned up at the front gate of the American Embassy compound seeking urgent assistance. In the absence of a coordinated response by UN agencies with IDP mandates (due to both the ban on activities and the overtly political connections of this group of IDPs to the opposition), embassies managed to refer several dozen to local NGOs, but safe houses and gathering places were limited. Dozens more IDPs are sleeping in the park across the street from the Embassy, waiting for some kind of large-scale solution. Church leaders, many of whom are in hiding, do not want to open the churches to IDPs because they know they cannot offer any protection. The Harare YWCA was recently raided by ZANU-PF youth militia, and has reluctantly closed down.

¶3. (SBU) On June 25, the Embassy of South Africa allowed several hundred IDPs seeking shelter to enter a parking lot on mission grounds after armed riot police arrived on the scene. Despite statements in the press by the South African ambassador on June 26 that they would not be allowed to stay, on June 27 embassies noted that there are now three tents in the parking lot, portable toilets, and cooking stations. In effect, the South African Embassy's parking lot, just two blocks away from USAID, has become an IDP camp for about 300 people. On June 26, a large group of IDPs went to the

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German embassy after hearing a rumor that European Union missions, and specifically Germany, were willing to receive displaced people. According to German diplomats, they refused the IDPs entry to the Chancery compound. After several hours, unarmed neighborhood police took away about 30 people in trucks. Their location is unknown. The remaining 23 in the group fled the scene and returned to Harvest House.

¶4. (SBU) These roaming IDPs face increasing harassment from official and unofficial GOZ actors. As their desperation increases, Post fears they will become more persistent in seeking shelter from embassies. Small-scale, under-the-radar efforts of civil society organizations and churches are attempting informal assistance efforts, but are not managing to meet the needs. Larger NGO efforts cannot be effectively mobilized due to the restriction on NGO operations and threats from the GOZ security apparatus.

¶5. (SBU) The dramatic increase in IDPs requesting embassy help appears to stem, in large part, from the June 23 police raid at the MDC's headquarters, Harvest House (Reftel B). Since the raid, the MDC has given supporters bus fare and encouraged them to return home. However, many IDPs, particularly those from high-density areas of Harare that continue to be wracked by violence and intimidating mobs of ZANU-PF youths (e.g. Epworth, Mbare, and Chitungwiza), refuse to return home. Having been turned away from Harvest House, not trusting the GOZ, is well known. His supporters hope that embassies will offer them the same refuge.

Numbers unknown, but growing

¶6. (SBU) The UN's Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) estimates there more than 33,000 IDPs in the country. However, this does not include many people recently fleeing into urban areas. It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of IDPs, given the void of existing information in the wake of the governmental ban on NGO activity. OCHA has not collected sufficient information on numbers or needs. Further complications arise when attempting to define IDP populations in this fluid context, and in calculating their numbers consistently. For example, some organizations are calculating the numbers of IDPs they assisted (with blankets, food, etc), but some of those people have since found temporary shelter with relatives or friends. OCHA

has not found a way to distinguish "new" IDPs from those who were formerly "assisted" and are still on the rolls.

¶17. (SBU) With the help of its partner NGOs, USAID is channeling food and non-food items, (such as soap, sanitary cotton wool, blankets, etc.) through the Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) and their informal coalition of partner churches. These non-food

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items have been pre-positioned at the district and parish level for distribution to IDPs to prevent them from having to move large distances in search of supplies and shelter. A few supplementary feeding programs are still operating on a smaller scale, and minor water and sanitation efforts continue in some districts. Most USAID partner responses have been very small-scale and unofficial as a result of the recent ban on NGO activity. This makes information gathering extremely difficult in the absence of trustworthy partner information collection.

NGOs operating well below capacity

¶18. (U) The majority of NGOs in Zimbabwe are operating with skeleton staff and have pulled all assets in from their field offices, making a nationwide response to IDP issues challenging. Additionally, existing relief efforts are coming under increasing scrutiny from security officials, and many church operations have ceased as a result. Individuals providing help put themselves at risk of arrest or worse. One Mission FSN was stopped this week for a couple hours when police saw that his truck was full of clothing. He was forced to produce receipts showing he had permission to transport the goods and was only released after RSO intervention. Emboff's main contact at Harvest House who was helping IDPs went into hiding early on June 27 after his home was visited by ZANU-PF youths threatening him.

International Organizations slow to respond

¶19. (SBU) Coordination mechanisms among NGOs, International Organizations (IOs) and donors have been insufficient to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. Although UNHCR is the sectoral lead for IDPs in Zimbabwe, the UN remains constrained by its own need to consult with the GOZ. Little tangible action has been taken to operationalize its leading role. OCHA is a weak actor (septel) and has not effectively addressed growing coordination concerns among donors. No consolidated contingency plan exists to address current and potential IDP needs in a cohesive manner. The Mobile and Vulnerable Population Working Group, currently chaired by IOM, has provided the most meaningful efforts at humanitarian coordination to date, and many USG partners are members of this group.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Zimbabwe urgently needs a cohesive solution to deal with the thousands of displaced people that have nowhere to go. Embassy protection cannot be a solution to this humanitarian crisis. Given the absence of comprehensive, meaningful humanitarian coordination and shrinking humanitarian working space, most threatened and displaced Zimbabweans currently are unable to receive necessary

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assistance in the form of the provision of food, shelter, and necessary supplies.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: The humanitarian community is struggling to address the growing displaced population and the escalating violence which may trigger even more significant population movements. UN and international efforts to address the growing problem of displacement and violence in Zimbabwe have been woefully inadequate. Post continues to monitor the situation and

address needs as possible. A task force is being put into place at USAID to establish and support structures in what we believe may very well be a protracted situation. END COMMENT.

MCCEE